



News Release

For Immediate Release
Thursday, April 22, 2010

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Vaccine Expert Launches Immunization Week in Utah

(Ogden, UT) – World-renowned pediatrician and immunization advocate, Paul Offit, MD, was the keynote speaker at today’s Northern Utah Immunization Coalition (NUIC) conference. The annual event kicks off National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) April 24–May 1, 2010. Dr. Offit is Chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases, Director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, and co-inventor of the rotavirus vaccine, RotaTeq.

Health care professionals from Bear River, Davis, and Weber-Morgan health districts hosted the immunization conference to hear Dr. Offit speak about the vaccine-autism controversy, anti-vaccine issues, and other misconceptions surrounding vaccine safety. Later, he encouraged physicians to continue their efforts to vaccinate children during a Grand Rounds at Lakeview Hospital in Bountiful.

“Vaccines are available to protect children from more vaccine-preventable diseases than ever before,” said Dr. Offit. “Unfortunately, many parents today are skeptical about vaccinating their children due to myths perpetuated by anti-vaccine groups. The goal is to improve children’s health by using proven and effective methods. Vaccines have a long track record of high efficiency and safety.”

The NUIC was formed in 1993 as part of the statewide “Every Child by Two” (ECBT) immunization coalition to address low immunization levels among two-year-olds in the northern counties of Box Elder, Cache, Davis, Rich, Morgan and Weber. The ECBT coalition was originally chaired by former First Lady Jacalyn Leavitt and is supported by the Utah Department of Health Immunization Program.

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Due largely to the efforts of statewide and regional immunization coalitions, immunization awareness has increased and initiatives have been developed to improve childhood immunization levels. Nationally, 76 percent of the nation's two-year-old children have received all the recommended childhood vaccinations. Currently, Utah is ranked 19th in the nation with 77 percent of two-year-olds adequately immunized. Previous rankings placed Utah at 66 percent, or third from the bottom.

Utah continues to face several challenges in getting children immunized on time, including parent schedules, large families, confusion about vaccines, and the expanding vaccine schedule. The NUIC plays a significant role in efforts to increase immunization levels because it reaches across several Northern Utah counties with a large number of parents with young children. "Every effort we can make to help parents immunize their children is one more step to improving immunization levels and reducing the chance of disease outbreaks," said Carol Morrell, NUIC Chair.

In recognition of NIIW, several counties and local immunization coalitions across Utah will hold activities. Dr. Offit will travel to Salt Lake City on April 23 for additional NIIW activities with the Greater Salt Lake Immunization Coalition.

For more information about NIIW events, contact the Utah Immunization Program at 801-538-9450 or your local public health department. For more information on immunization, contact your health care provider, public health department or the Utah Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659.

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